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United States' Iran Phobia—The Nuke Factor



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Abstract

There are certain events in History which keep repeating themselves. The paradoxical relation between Iran and the United States and its allies is one such event. The immediate causes of this conflict keep changing—issues range from oil, to hostage crisis to sale of arms (became famous as Iran-Contra Affairs). While the actors and the period of this conflict experience modifications every time it grabs the headlines, there are certain inherent tendencies among these international players that remain constant which may not always meet the eye.

It is wise to declare that both the players have their respective agendas to fulfil in the international stage. However, the question that generally remains unanswered is which are the factors that drive those agendas. Events could actually be viewed in a different light than what one is made to believe.

This paper endeavours to uncover the reasons behind the agendas within the paradigm of sociology of international relations. The aim of this paper is to understand how religion

Key Points

1. The relationship between Iran and the United States has been witness to myriad of historical events.
2. Apart from some of the known causes like oil, there is a very significant latent factor which underlines the basics of the relationship—use of religion.
3. Iran oftentimes has drawn inspiration from Islam which defines its attitude towards the United States.
4. The United States has its justification to indulge in a paradoxical relation with Iran, without jeopardising its Middle Eastern alliances.
5. There are sometimes more than what meets the eyes.

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United States' Iran Phobia ...

plays a significant role within the broader debate of oil distribution. Religion attains an agency to drive the power sharing among the plethora of actors both inside and outside the parameters of geography of the region of the Middle East. However, the paper shall be limited to the debate surrounding the Nuclear issue.

The paper has been attempted drawing on religious ideas behind the propaganda of the players without trying to focus on any particular event between the two major players. Hence there are references from historical sources which facilitate unravelling deeper reasons. The paper attempts to weigh the reasons, covert as well as overt, of both the parties to further its respective propaganda. There are more than what meets the eye.

Introduction

The word "phobia" as per Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary implies an extreme or abnormal dislike or fear of something. And they say the United States of America (henceforth, the US) suffers from Iran phobia or great dislike or fear of Iran. Those who say this should remember that the US seems to suffer from fear of China as well. And it goes without saying that the US is equally scared of Japan or Germany. We are Indians, so we talk of the China phobia of the US and Iran phobia of the US. Since we are not the denizens of Africa or South America, we are not much aware of whether America has South Africa phobia or Brazil phobia. It goes without saying that America has been acclaimed as the richest and most powerful country.

Taking a cue from the above, America's behaviour with Iran through the decades shows that America cannot put up with Iran peacefully. Or else why should America and its friends boycott Iran on the trade front? It will not be out of place to point out that such economic boycott was first launched by Napoleon Bonaparte with a view to bringing England to her knees.¹ Since then any likely behaviour to control the powerful was termed as boycott. Later on, the verb "to boycott" was also coined. To boycott was a tool in

the hands of Indian freedom fighters to pull down the British Raj and no doubt it delivered the goods to a large extent to the Indian nationalist movement.²

The more a country is woven into the web of the world market the more the ploy of boycott is helpful against it. But one wonders whether Iran has succumbed to the boycott ploy or not? The existing economic system that seeks to conquer the world might break down all of a sudden. May be the forces of globalisation are charging the windmill like another Don Quixote.³ Iran and many other countries might survive the trauma of being outcast from the global trade community through developing a self-sufficient economy or what we call alternative Economics.⁴ Iran was therefore spared the economic recession that had hit the world market so hard.

The Questions

However, the question still remains, why the sanctions against Iran? It is said that Iran is keen on forging atom bombs. America the self-styled guardian of all the states in the globe cannot let a country manufacture atom bombs in the interest of world peace, it is alleged.

This puts in our mind two significant questions. Firstly, is Iran really engaged in manufacturing atom bombs? Earlier it was alleged that Iraq was manufacturing atom bombs. Iraq was conquered by the Americans. But even having conquered Iraq the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) could not unearth a single factory where atom bombs were being manufactured. The Americans could not give the world sufficient evidence in defence of the allegations against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Well, if you want to kill a dog, give it a bad name! If you want to attack a country, allege that the latter is engaged in manufacturing atomic weapons. We could decry Saddam Hussein for the ruthless attitude towards the Kurds or towards the Shias. But the allegations that America posed against Hussein were false. On that false excuse America mowed down Saddam's Iraq. The result of that folly is for everyone to see. But who dares to sue America at the International court situated at Hague?⁵

Secondly, is the manufacture of an atom bomb by a country which had no atom bomb earlier, that much threatening to world peace and America? Already there are some half a dozen atomic powers besides America. There are India, Pakistan, China, France, Russia and so on. This is no longer a secret. Nowadays the secret of manufacturing an atom bomb is known to the scientific world everywhere. And hence any country can manufacture an atom bomb if it wants to. The countries engaged in developing atomic power for peace can use their atomic reactors for war in a flash. In such context if Tehran goes ahead to manufacture an A-bomb is it a great sacrilege? The answer is perhaps a resounding No.

What could then ail America? The answer they say is very simple. America has great interest in the oil production of the Middle East. Fine! But America itself has a lot of oil resource which is not being tapped. So why should America irritate the public opinion of the world seeking to control the oil resource of the Middle East? I shall try to find an answer to this riddle. Is there something more than that meets the eye?

To put into perspective, the oil industry in Iraq was state-owned under Iraq National Oil Company. The slogan of the Baathist regime was "Arab oil for the Arabs."⁶ The Shias are a majority in Iraq but a minority Islamic sect in the world.⁷ And it was the Shias who wanted to dislodge Saddam Hussein. It may be that America played into the hands of the Shia billionaires. But mark you, Tehran also played into support of the Shias. It attacked Iraq. At that time America did not support Tehran. Both the countries had the same agenda on the surface. But one is apt to ask why America did not support Tehran during Iraq Iran war?⁸ Probably the answer lies in the Embassy hostage crisis.⁹ Perhaps the US supported the Shias in Iraq to bring them out of the fold of Iranian influence. "Chalabi, in particular, was successful at convincing U.S. neocons in Washington that a Shia government in Iraq would be moderate, pro-American, and pro-Israeli and would in no way be an Iranian satellite."¹⁰ Yes, that is very urgent for America.

Many questions remained unanswered when we dug deeper into the eternal enmity between Iran and the US ... Let us have a close look at some of the comments made from time to time by the who's who of America against Iran.

Iran An Enigma

"Clinton named Iran as the hardest of the hard boards of the dangers its behavior already poses and geometrically greater danger that a nuclear armed Iran pose." – Annual US-Israel forum. ABC News. December 2012.

"Hope is a strong word. You don't trust them ... Let's see what they come with. They better come serious, ready to deal and give up their nuclear program. The window is finite." – Susan Rice US ambassador to the UN on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

"If they [Iran] continue and if they proceed with a nuclear weapon ... we have options that we are prepared to implement to ensure that not happen." – Leon Panetta, Secretary of Defence. *The Telegraph*, January 28, 2012.

"United states will do what we must to stop Iran from getting Nuclear weapon" – Barack Obama, President, United States of America at United Nations General Assembly, 2012.

The above quotations are testimony to the fear that America has been garnering against Iran ever since George W. Bush made his "Axis of Evil" speech.¹¹ Iran is transformed into an enigma.

"The new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran contain some unambiguously good news: that Tehran halted a covert Nuclear weapons program in 2003 and that it is responsive to the sort of international pressure applied by the US and other Western Governments ... [however] Iran's massive overt investment in Uranium enrichment meanwhile proceeds in defiance of binding UN resolutions ... "¹²

In the middle of the 1990s the United States' intelligence community suspected the presence of a hidden nuclear

activity programme of Iran. However, the evidence gathered were all circumstantial in nature. Hence America at that time could not rally the broad-based international support to stop Iranian civilian nuclear programme.¹³

Today unlike the 1990s there is extensive direct evidence of Iranian efforts to deceive the international community in violation of its Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreement about its dual use nuclear fuel cycle capabilities. Even as the present author writes, there is no direct or indirect evidence of Iran's effort in producing nuclear weapons. The entire debate revolves around its enrichment programme beyond the permitted level¹⁴ which could easily be transformed into weapons.

It all started when IAEA¹⁵ Director General Mohammed El Baradei¹⁶ reported that Iran had repeatedly and over an extended period of time failed to meet its safeguard obligations including by failing to meet its Uranium Enrichment Programme. Iran has been transformed into an enigma. Claims and counter-claims flying all across the Atlantic where both parties assured the world of the rightfulness of its positions. We are left in dismay to draw our own interpretations.

"Taqiyya" – The Source

Something is going on in Iran. The present author, it is obvious, did not strike an unknown chord within the academic fraternity. The world's countries are so neatly intertwined that any upheaval in any corner of the world, no matter how grave or trivial, has the capacity to have a tremendous fallout on the others, directly or indirectly. And it is probably due to this, that a paper on Iran needed the exploration of the geopolitics of the entire region without being confined to only the geographical boundaries of the country. The "clandestine" nuclear activities of Iran have made the world suspicious of its "supposed" peaceful nuclear enrichment programme and thereby she is at the receiving end of some serious

sanctions from almost all possible corners of the world particularly led by the US. A few questions have perturbed my mind ever since I began my work on this—Why is Iran so keen on continuing with its nuclear programme despite repeated and serious sanctions? Why is the United States so hell bent on dismantling the nuclear structure of Iran? Is it possible to zero in on any one of them and put the blame? How will the geopolitics of the region undergo change if Iran eventually gets hold of nuclear weapon? Why is America not attacking Iran?

Before delving further into the analysis of the questions mentioned above, it is necessary on my part to deal with the undesirability and the strangeness of Iran's nuclear programme.

Iran is a signatory to the NPT which was signed in the year 1968¹⁷ and hence legally it is bound by its rules and regulations. Thus, within the capacity as delineated by NPT, it cannot acquire or produce nuclear weapon. Henceforth it is "undesirable" to break an international law. The question thus remains, is Iran truly engaged in producing a weapon or is it using its resources to embark on a peaceful nuclear activity for civilian purposes as is her sovereign right guaranteed by the above said Treaty.¹⁸

Everyone of us is aware of the tremendous cost-production, security and environmental hazards that any kind of nuclear programme brings along with it. Iran's supreme religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has reiterated time and again that it is against their religious doctrine to produce nuclear weapons. However, the *New York Times* highlighted "the possibility of 'Taqiyya' in Khomeini's denial of Iranian nuclear ambitions. It is a form of religious dissimulation or legal dispensation which the Shia Islam propagates, whereby a believer can deny his faith or commit otherwise illegal or blasphemous acts when he or she is at risk of significant persecution.¹⁹ Is it then possible that the denial of nuclear programme is an extension of the same philosophy?" What then is

the reason behind Iran's clandestine nuclear activities with such a heavy price of sanction and isolation? Thus, it is indeed "strange." Iran with its rich natural resources, both oil and gas, can very well use them to its advantage.

The crux of the paper lies in answering these two complex questions.

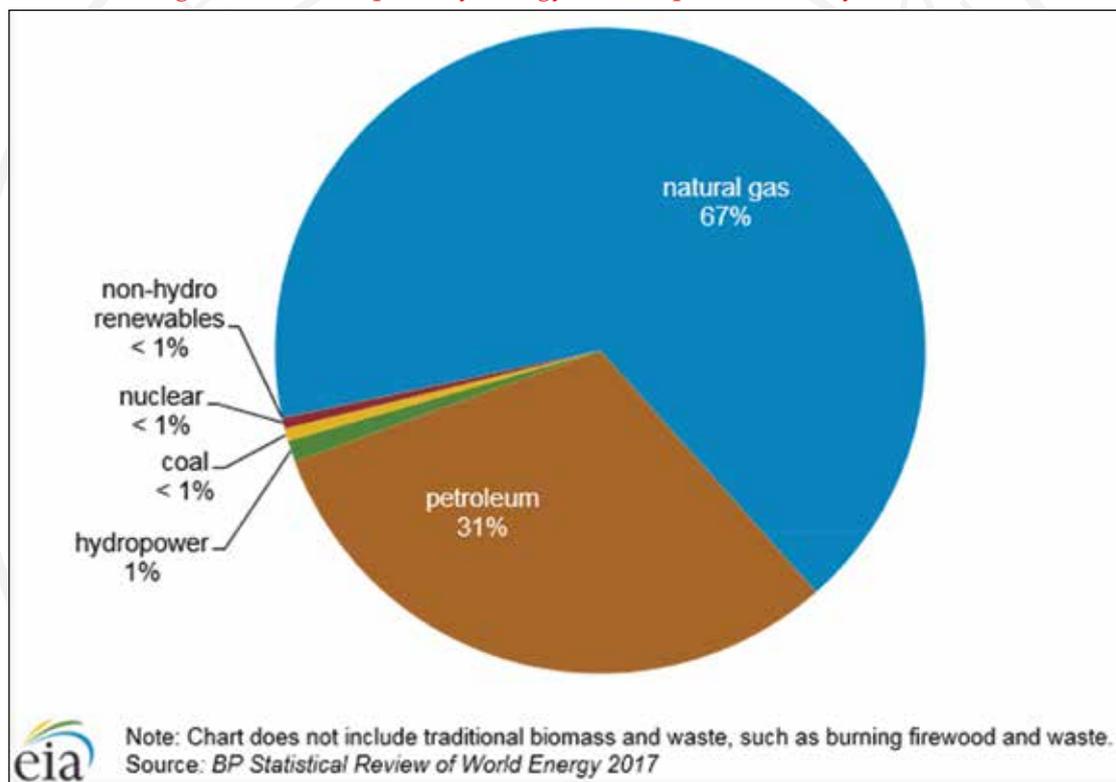
Justification of Iran

Of all the countries in the region Iran is the only country that has a direct interface with Central Asia, West Asia,

and South Asia. Iran's centrality, its commanding position in the Persian Gulf, domination of the Strait of Hormuz, a geographically well suited position for oil and gas pipelines emanating from the Central Asian republics and energy rich Caspian Sea region, all make it a fulcrum of West Asia.

Civilian nuclear programme of Iran has some reasonable justification. Iran has the fourth highest crude oil reserves and second largest natural gas reserves.²⁰

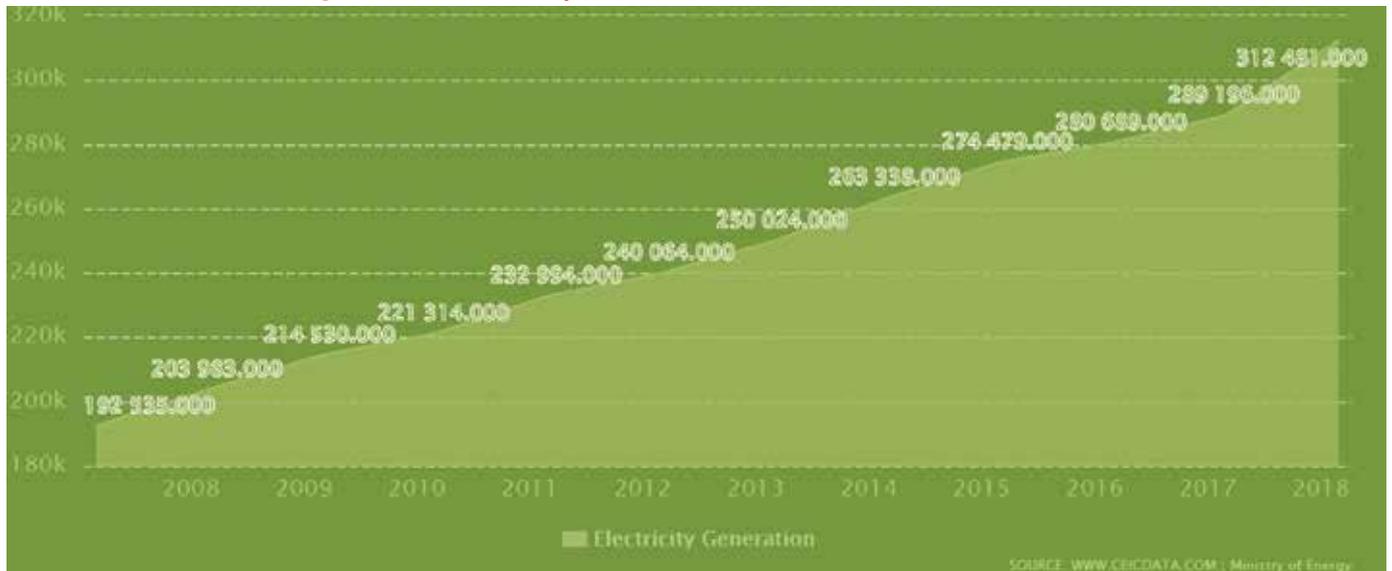
Fig. 1. Iran's total primary energy consumption, share by fuel, 2016



Though Iran has one of the highest oil reserves of the world, unfortunately it lacks basic refining capabilities on its soil. "Iran has been forced to import gasoline as a result of the international sanctions that cut its access to equipment and spare parts for refinery maintenance. Refining capacity itself was too low to meet domestic demand for fuels."²¹ The result thus is that Iran has to import the gasoline it needs for domestic consumption. However, this is reducing because Iran "in recent weeks started the

second phase of the Persian Gulf Star Refinery at Bandar Abbas, which converts light crude, known as condensate, into gasoline and naphtha."²² Its world ranking is the second, following the US as the largest importer of gasoline.²³ Recent reports indicate that Iran is facing significant risk of severe power shortages forcing Iran to reschedule its office hours.²⁴ The Iranian government hopes that the introduction of the Bushehr facility into the power grid will help prevent shortages.²⁵

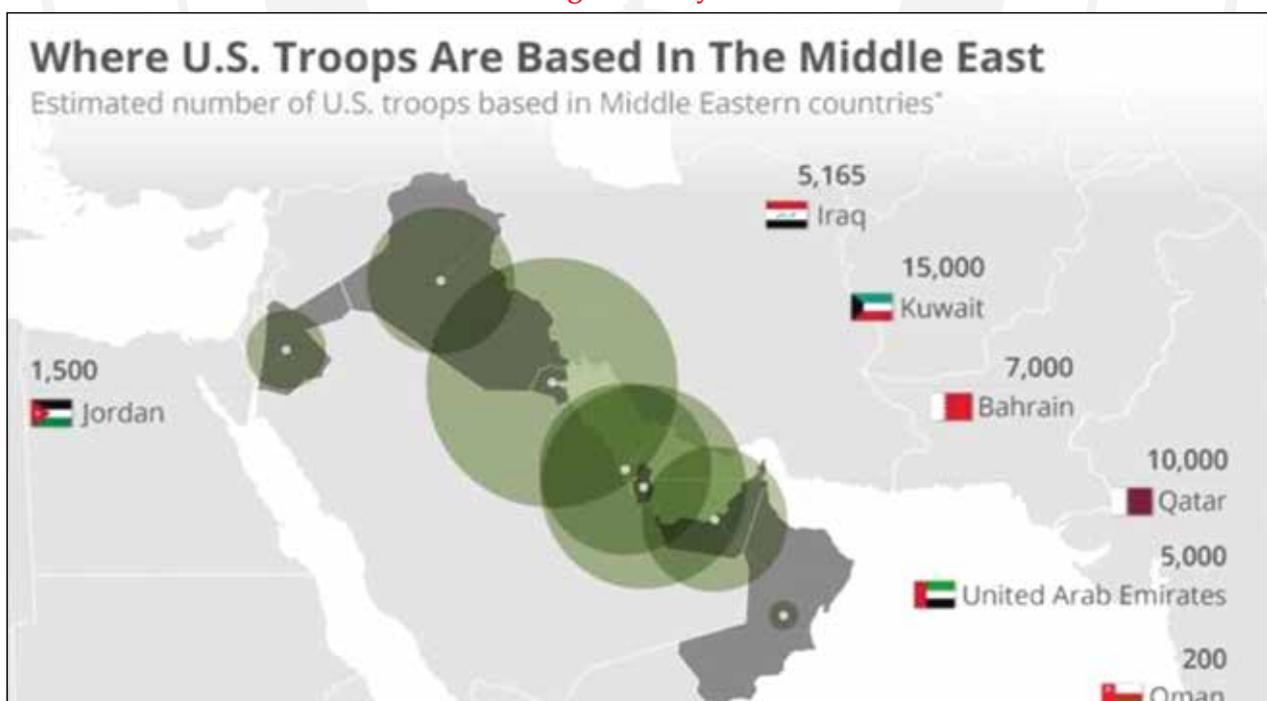
Fig. 2. Iran's Electricity Production from 1964 to 2018 in the chart



Additionally, Iran shares its eastern border with Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both of which experience substantive American presence persistently. While Pakistan is United States' ally in the latter's war against terror, Afghanistan was the US' first victim in this campaign. With a pledge to flush out the Taliban

from their stronghold, America along with its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies, had attacked Afghanistan in 2001.²⁶ How far America has succeeded in its endeavour to substantially defeat the Taliban remains to be judged by history.

Pic. 4: Image courtesy: Press Tv



Pakistan is suffering from her own home-grown terrorist problem that has been let loose. There is much anger among the ordinary people of Pakistan for the latter’s continuous alignment with the US.²⁷ Some analysts have already dubbed the country as the future failed state²⁸ just like Somalia. Thus, Iran’s eastern border is in a constant state of turmoil with peace nowhere near to be found.

America’s second victim of war on terror, Iraq, lies to the western side of Iran. Although the bulk of US forces has left Iraq, there still exists substantive American presence in the country. Moreover, sectarian divisions within the country have always kept her on the boil. Every day there are reports of people getting killed in unidentified bomb explosions. The country is constantly under the fear of what some call Sunni uprising.²⁹

Iran’s north-eastern side has Turkmenistan which houses American base. The United States has gained access to use almost all the military airfields of Turkmenistan, including the airport in Nebit-Dag near the Iranian border which was reconstructed at American expense.³⁰ Turkey is a NATO member and

stations US military bases. The Patriot missile set up by NATO forces on the border of Turkey and Iran is not only a threat for Syria but Iran as well. Since it is only about five hundred kilometres from where the units will be located to Tabriz in Iran where some say there are secret nuclear facilities.

Across the Gulf Iran does not share a very cordial relationship with any of the Sunni-led countries which has been a traditional US ally in war or no war. Thus, US military bases continue to form a strategic envelope around Iran.³¹ With the noose tightening all around her, the Islamic Republic is thus left with fewer options than going nuclear, to ensure its survival amidst deteriorating relations with the world’s most powerful country and her own sectarian rivals.

Secondly, oppression is one of the central concepts in Shiism and the “supplanting of Ali” in the selection of the first Caliph and the martyrdom of his son Hussain are still fundamental in the Shia’s attitude towards the Sunnis.³² For their part Sunni rulers have regarded the Shia as a lower caste and an underclass or as misguided Muslims throughout history. Such an extreme feeling runs within both the Islamic denominations.



Image courtesy: Council on Foreign Relations.

Iran is surrounded by countries—Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, etc.—with majority Sunni population.³³ If both the groups view each other in such light then neither can be comfortable with the other’s presence. There is, thus, an inherent conflict brewing within them since time immemorial. Two questions need special mention here: Is Islam being

used by the regional players to pursue their goal of self-interest? If yes, who is using it—the Shias led by Iran, the Sunnis led by Saudi Arabia or is it American ploy to keep the entire region in a constant state of turmoil to pursue its oil interest? Whichever case may gain favour, one important point may be ignored only at one’s peril that religion is a definite

game changer. Thus, Iran has ample reason to take recourse to the nuclear option.

The previous President of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, had once called for the total elimination of Israel from the world map,³⁴ which had sent shivers all across the Jewish fraternity. Similar kind of feeling is displayed on the Israeli side as well. Ehud Olmert had once remarked, “Iran is major threat to the well-being of Europe and America just as much as it is for the state of Israel.”³⁵ The world has witnessed such curses and counter-curses between the Jewish and the Arabs ever since Israel has come into existence, much to the chagrin of the Muslim world. While Iran is accused of regularly arming groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah working against Israel,³⁶ the latter sits comfortably with America’s blessings with de facto nuclear presence within its authority.

“Israel’s regional nuclear monopoly which has proved remarkably durable for the past four decades has long fuelled instability in the middle east. In no other region of the world does a lone unchecked nuclear state exist. It is Israel’s nuclear arsenal, not Iran desire for one that has contributed most to the current crisis. Power, after all, begs to be balanced. What is surprising about the Israeli case is that it has taken so long for a potential balancer to emerge.”³⁷

Israel is under constant threat that if Iran is allowed to go ahead with its nuclear programme, unhindered, the latter might use it to arm the so-called non-state actors thereby posing a grave threat to Israeli existence. Iran on the other feels that going nuclear has prevented the US-led Western powers to act against North Korea apart from economic and trade sanctions, and forced them to diplomatically deal with the crisis. While the giving up of the same by Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya has led to their brutal downfall. The former’s nuclear installations were destroyed during Operation Desert Fox in December 1998,³⁸ while the latter voluntarily gave it up in return for some rewards (lethal weapons) in 2003 as stated by Wikileaks.³⁹

“It is also a ‘*matter of pride*’⁴⁰ for the Iranians not to fall behind the regional powers such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, India, Pakistan, South Africa and South Korea.” George Perkovich from the Carnegie Endowment says “Even if it is constrained, it will get an aura associated with a nuclear state. The problem lies in states engaging for the sake of it irrespective of the productivity that it may yield. It is important to deal with the possession of nuclear technology to ensure any breakthrough in the attempts, especially in the case of Iran, considering the possible spill-over effect that it could lead to.”⁴¹ He is possibly pointing to the cascading effect of chain of nuclear proliferation that it might lead to in the region.

Justification of the US

There exist three points of contention between US and Iran—fostering nuclear proliferation, sponsoring terrorism and obstructing the Arab-Israeli peace process and additionally Tehran’s alleged role in destabilising Iraq. Apart from these, US officials accuse Iran of helping Syrian leadership to try to defeat a supposed popular opposition movement and taking advantage of Shiite majority unrest against the Sunni-led pro-US government of Bahrain. Why is the US so keen to dismantle the nuclear structure of particularly Iran? I will try to decode each of the above points of contention between the two countries in addition to two more.

Firstly, as has already been pointed out that all around the Middle East region we find substantive US presence. It has three interpretations. For America, she has her own logic to be present here. Being the most powerful country of the world, it has an omnipresent complex. It wants the world to not only feel (intangible) but see (tangible) her presence. And, as psychologists say, by stressing visual learning which is even more effective.⁴² It can also quickly and easily respond to calls of distress of its allies if they are threatened from known or unknown sources.

US naval, air, and ground forces are dependent for bases, refuelling and supplies on Gulf Arab rulers,

predominantly Sunnis, who are deeply concerned about the progress Iran has made in its supposed nuclear programme, but also about the rising challenge to their regimes posed by the Arab Spring and the galvanising impact on popular unrest of an Israeli attack on Iran.⁴³ Since the US needs their support for its presence in the region it is expected of America to give a voice to their demand of preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear powered state and assure them of all possible steps in attaining the objective. And this is how America is actually being used to further the Sunni interest of which America is very much aware.

“Iran, on the other, has managed to take advantage of the situation: Proximity also renders the US and its interest more vulnerable. Iran’s tactic has been to treat the US as a ‘potential hostage’, that is to keep the country involved in the conflicts of the region so as to divert attention and efforts away from preventing the advancement of Iran’s nuclear program.”⁴⁴

The second most populated group in America is the Jews. The Jewish lobby is one of the most powerful and influential lobbies in the world. It has tremendous capacity to not only influence but also direct, Middle-East politics through US politicians in Israel’s favour. Chuck Hagel, 24th US Secretary of Defence, had revealed, “The Jewish People intimidates a lot of people on Capitol Hill into taking actions on behalf of Israel and often contrary to US interest.” And regarding Iran he had said “I think engagement is clearly in our interest.”⁴⁵

Moreover Western intellectual arena from time immemorial has been adorned by Jewish nationals – Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Freud, Jacques Derrida, Noam Chomsky, Spinoza, Karl Marx, et al.⁴⁶ The result is, no American President can turn a blind eye to the Israeli demand of some tough measures against its rival, Iran, and definitely so if the latter is trying to dislodge her monopoly in the region as the de facto nuclear state. However, the US has aptly made it clear that isolated military action by Israel shall never have US backing.⁴⁷ Israel’s tremendous defence capacities, however, permits her to single-

handedly attack without anybody’s support. How far such an attack will be successful in preventing the nuclear ambition of a determined country is best left for history to judge. The 1981 Israeli attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor of Iraq may have delayed Iraq’s progress⁴⁸ but similar air strikes are unlikely to disable Iran’s capacities since its uranium enrichment facilities can be hidden underground or widely dispersed.

The region is known as the hotbed of fundamentalist movements.⁴⁹ Various known as well as unknown terror networks operate from this soil. Some of them enjoy the backing of state while others are suffering from it. They are being used to wage proxy wars where direct confrontation is not possible. The region provides a safe haven to these terror groups. They have two main targets: Israel and the United States. The latter have been largely successful in stopping any further terror attacks on its soil since 9/11, apart from, for example, the 2013 Boston marathon bombing and the attack on its bases in other countries like the one in Libya where US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed.⁵⁰

In such a scenario, ensuring the protection of its citizens, its military bases, and its oil interest happens to be of utmost priority to the US government. America has been accusing Iran of supporting terror groups like Hamas and Hezbollah of Palestine and Lebanon respectively, for a long time. And it also fears that Iran might use its nuclear weapons through these groups to wage war against the greater and lesser Satan.⁵¹ While none of them in the region is innocent of this crime. There is ample evidence to prove Saudi Arabia’s systemic funding of terror groups like Al-Qaeda.⁵² Mossad, Israel’s spy agency, is guilty of many such activities, like target killing, which in the popular parlance may not be something desirable.⁵³ However that does not absolve Iran of her crime.

After the removal of Saddam Hussein from Iraq, a Shia-led government came to power in Iraq. Shias and the Kurds have been at the receiving end all throughout Saddam’s period of rule. Hence with the rise of a Shia government

in power, the Shia movement has gained momentum in the region. And with the substantive backing of Iran, the concept of “Shia Crescent”⁵⁴ – Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan – has got its final form. Former US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, describes Iran’s policy in Iraq as “fairly ambivalent.” “They were doing some things that were not helpful, but they were also doing some things that were helpful.”⁵⁵

“Suffice it to say that, like Syria, Iran too has sought to win time for itself by cooperating with the US wherever it can, notably in Iraq, ... Sistani is for all purposes Iran’s man in Iraq and would not have cooperated so fully with US without Iran’s active support.”⁵⁶

Attack on Iraq has another explanation as well. Most of the hijackers of 9/11 that led to the destruction of World Trade Centre, were people of Saudi origin. It can be argued that America waged a war against Iraq to demonstrate to the Saudi Government that the latter was not their only ally and such acts of aggression shall be dealt with by the Americans with a heavy hand. By dislodging Saddam Hussein and putting up a friendly government in Iraq (which again occupies a very strategic location similar to Iran), America shall forge new areas of coalition. In the midst of such calculations, or rather miscalculations, one of the unintended consequences of the Iraq war was the brownie point scored by Iran with a Shia government in Iraq inclined towards her.

Antonia Juhasz, states, “They [US] have done quite well for themselves, landing production targets for some of the world’s largest remaining oilfields under some of the most lucrative terms.”⁵⁷ Accepting the popular notion if oil was the main motive behind the US invasion of Iraq, what now, when the US failed to privatise the oil industry. It declared foreign investment in Iraq has been permitted for all other sectors except oil.⁵⁸ The reasons, however, do not require elaboration here. If the US has got no direct interest in Iraq, what then is her indirect interest? Is it once again playing in the hands of her powerful Sunni allies?

Dr. Zalloum, an international oil consultant and economist who has spent fifty years in the oil business in the US, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, commented, “The last thing that US cares about in the Middle East is Democracy. It is about oil. Full stop.”⁵⁹ That oil is a major factor in the geopolitics of the region hardly anybody can deny. And America is the protagonist. For reasons well known, America is dependent on her allies in the region, mostly Sunni-led governments, for oil, and it is for this that an interesting fact needs special mention here.

Discussions

The correlation between Shia populated areas and oil is a well-known fact, “Many of the Persian-Gulf-based Shiites, particularly those in eastern Saudi Arabia and southern Iraq, inhabit lands rich in oil, which has created tension between the Shiites and their Sunni neighbors ... In Saudi Arabia, the Usuli Shiite community, based mainly in the oil-rich province of al-Hasa, is not officially recognized by the Saudi regime.”⁶⁰ It places importance on two important issues. First, Shias in the Middle East live mostly on the coast of the Persian Gulf, an area of high strategic interest both in terms of energy resources and access to them by the seas. Secondly the Iranian government is the only Shia country that has de facto power over energy resources that lie inside its territory,⁶¹ though other oil resources in the Persian Gulf states are controlled by governments that are US allies. However, here also one needs to know another fact. “North-east Saudi Arabia is where most of the oil reserves are situated, it is here that Saudi oil giant Aramco is located, and this is also at present the main oil producing area. It is also a Shiite dominated area.”⁶² There are frequent reports of serious sectarian strife in the area which was put down by the Saudis with a heavy hand.⁶³ Again, Manama, the US Fifth Fleet headquarters, is the capital of Bahrain and is 70% Shia which also experiences frequent turmoil.⁶⁴

Iran considers Syria a lynchpin of “axis of resistance”⁶⁵ against Israel that also includes the Lebanese Hezbollah

and the Palestinian Hamas. No doubt why the US is so concerned about the Syrian situation! Though the US initially had started supporting the rebels of Syria, they have reduced their support once the terror linkages of the rebels surfaced. Now the rebels are complaining to the Western powers of shortage of arms and funds. Thus it is difficult to predict as to which side the scales of balance shall tilt. While one side is trying to break the Shia crescent, the other is trying to form it. Whosoever wins Syria shall be their prized possession.

Thus there are many war fronts on which the battle between Iran and the US shall be waged in the days to come.

While the entire confusion regarding the Iranian Nuclear programme was gradually unfolding, Iran, no doubt, has scored some brownie points. In addition to the points mentioned above (Iran keeping the US as potential hostage and majority of oil reserves in the Shia dominated areas), two others need special attention.

Besides Bushehr, Iran has declared fourteen nuclear facilities and nine locations where nuclear research is being conducted in accordance with its safeguard obligations of the IAEA. Although much of the focus of the international community is on growing enrichment capabilities, Tehran has attempted to diversify its nuclear portfolio giving its leaders multiple avenues to achieve a nuclear weapons capability if they elect to do so.⁶⁶

According to Sick, the irony is that the US itself created the optimal conditions for Iran to strengthen its position: Iran's rival Taliban and Ba'ath regime were removed, and a Shia government was set up in Baghdad.⁶⁷ Perhaps this has something to do with unintended consequences. The term is widely used in social science and was popularised by American Sociologist, Robert K. Merton. It implies an action which had a consequence opposite to the one expected. In this case it had a perverse effect, the third in the typology of unintended consequences. It explains

when an intended solution makes a problem worse. However, this is definitely so from the American point of view.⁶⁸

There is probably one way of explaining this kind of US foreign policy. And that is neo-conservatism⁶⁹ whose main ideology speaks of free market, spread of aggressive democracy and furthering of US foreign policy by any possible means, even military action. A piece of information which could be of interest to the readers is that, at the second inauguration of the presidency of George W. Bush, he used the word "freedom" twenty-seven times in twenty-one minutes and promised to use American might "to spread democracy and to end tyranny everywhere on earth."⁷⁰

Robert Kagan, one of the leading neo-conservative ideologues of the regime, wrote "the goal of American foreign policy is now to spread Democracy, for its own sake, for reasons that transcend specific threats. In short, Bush has unmoored his foreign policy from the war on terrorism."⁷¹

The phrase which demands special attention is "for reasons that transcend specific threats." In other words, the US under the garb of neo-conservatism now reserves the right to invade any country it wishes, in the name of democracy, even when no credible charge of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and links with the so called Al-Qaeda can be levelled.⁷²

While severing all links with the Monroe Doctrine,⁷³ America now has three basic agendas:

- To prevent external hegemonic control over critical geopolitical areas of the world and thereby the rise of other powerful states.
- Expand the liberal political order internationally.
- To sustain an open economic regime.

Conclusion

Although there is a thaw in the current conflict between the two actors, it has the potential to keep the world leaders on their toes at any time. The reasons lie in the

constant factor in the form of religious sectarianism which keeps unfolding and appearing before the two countries in myriad forms. It is impossible to address this permanent factor and seek a long-term solution

that regard.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive account of the period see, for instance, Francois Crouzet, "The Second Hundred Years War: Some Reflections," *French History*, vol. 10, (1996), pp. 432-50.
2. See, for instance, Bipan Chandra, "India's Struggle for Independence" (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988).
3. Don Quixote, fully titled *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* is a Spanish novel written by Miguel de Cervantes. It follows the adventure of Alonso Quijano, a hidalgo who reads so many chivalric novels that he decides to set out to revive chivalry under the name of Don Quixote. He decides to go out as a Knight-errant in search of adventure.
4. Even after obtaining an education, gathering skills, and training, hard work and paying their dues, achieving success or merely comfortable survival has become very difficult. People, out of disappointment, are turning away from this situation in disgust and are helping to develop an Alternative Economics. It serves the need of the people first and profit second. The *Occupy Wall Street* movement is a testimony to the growing popularity of this Economics with the famous slogan: "We are the 99%."
5. The International Court of Justice is the primary judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It is based in the Peace Palace in the Hague, the Netherlands. Its main functions are to settle legal disputes submitted to it by states and to provide advisory opinions on legal questions submitted to it by duly authorised international organs, agencies, and the UN General Assembly.
6. Valdrin Xhemaj, "Iraq: What happened to the oil after the war?" *The Conversation*, Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/iraq-what-happened-to-the-oil-after-the-war-62188> on January 3, 2019.
7. "The Sunni-Shia divide," *Council on Foreign Relations* available at <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/sunni-shia-divide#!/sunni-shia-divide> accessed on January 3, 2019.
8. Martin Weiss, *War of Blackmail*. Safehaven. Retrieved on January 16, 2013 from <http://www.moneyandmarkets.com>
9. A diplomatic crisis between Iran and the US where 52 Americans were held hostage in the American Embassy of Tehran for 444 days from November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981 in support of the Iranian Revolution of 1979.
10. Oula Khadum, "The transnational politics of Iraq's Shia Diaspora" *Carnegie Middle East Centre*. Retrieved from <https://carnegie-mec.org/2018/03/01/transnational-politics-of-iraq-s-shia-diaspora-pub-75675> on January 3, 2019.
11. *The Guardian*, January 28, 2003.
12. *Washington Post*, December 20, 2005.
13. Larisa Alexandrovna and Muriel Kane, "CIA set to step up operations against Iran." (2007) Retrieved on January 18, 2018 from <http://www.globalresearch.ca>
14. Article IV(1) of the NPT states: "Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty." The permitted level is up to 20% which is sufficient for civilian purposes. Anything beyond that is unlawful as per NPT guidelines.
15. For further details, visit <http://www.iaea.org>
16. Mohamed Mustafa Elbaradei was the Director General of International Atomic Energy Agency from 1997 to 2009.
17. The NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. The Treaty represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States. Opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty entered into force in 1970.
18. Article IV (1) of the NPT, loc. cit.
19. "Seeking Nuclear Insight in Fog of the Ayatollah's Utterances," <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/14/world/middleeast/seeking-nuclear-insight-in-fog-of-the-ayatollahs-utterances.html>
20. Country Analysis Brief—Iran, U.S. Energy Information Administration, retrieved from http://www.eia.gov/countries/country_analysis_brief/iran/2018/EIA_Iran_9abr2018.pdf on January 3, 2019.
21. Irina Slav, "Iran Reports 36% Drop In Gasoline Imports In Q1," *Oil Price.com*, retrieved from <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Iran-Reports-36-Drop-In-Gasoline-Imports-In-Q1.html> on January 3, 2019.

agreeable to all the parties. What can, at best, be achieved is try and understand the inner contradictions that drive the foreign policies of the two countries towards each other. This paper is a small attempt in

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23. Saideh Lotfian, "Implication of Nuclear power programs and nuclear threats in the Middle East," in *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. XX, No. 4(2008) pp. 41-79.
24. "Electricity shortage forces Iran to change working hours of state structures in Tehran," *Trend News Agency*, July 4, 2018. Retrieved from <https://en.trend.az/iran/business/2924833.html> on January 3, 2019.
25. Mehdi Askarieh, *Iran in the 21st century – politics, economics and conflict*, edited by Homa Katonzian and Hossein Shahidi (New York: Routledge, 2008).
26. US forces attacked Afghanistan post 9/11 in 2001 to destroy the Taliban hideouts from the region who were suspected of being involved in the World Trade Centre attack.
27. For a detailed study see, for instance, Eamon Murphy, *The Making of Terrorism in Pakistan – Historical and Social Roots of Extremism* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
28. Anant Arpita, "Pakistan observes Kashmir Solidarity Day." (2012) Retrieved on January 26, 2013 from http://idsa.in/idsacomments/IransNuclearEnrichmentProgramme_ragarwal_091112
29. Reuters, January 29, 2013.
30. *Al Jazeera*, May 1, 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/04/2012417131242767298.html>
31. Mari Loumi, "Sectarian identities or Geopolitics – The regional Shia-Sunni divide in the Middle East." The Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Working Paper 56, 2008.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
34. President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's UN General Assembly Speech, July 26, 2012.
35. Ehud Olmert, Former Prime Minister of Israel (2006-9) in an interview to *Time Magazine*.
36. Global Research. January 31, 2013. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/hamas-acknowledges-irans-support/5312719>
37. Kenneth Waltz, "Why Iran should get the bomb?" *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2012.
38. A major campaign by the United States and the United Kingdom from December 16-19, 1998 against Iraq's military and security targets that contribute to Iraq's ability to produce or store weapons of mass destruction.
39. Pemberton, Ash. (2011) *Libya: Wikileaks exposes US-Gaddafi ties*. Retrieved on January 31, 2013 from <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/48732>
40. Lotfian, loc. cit., pp. 44-79.
41. George Perkovich. (2012) "The Iranian nuclear challenge and the GCC." Retrieved on January 20, 2012 from <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/31/iranian-nuclear-challenge-and-gcc/b67p>
42. See, for instance, Oliver Caviglioli and Ian Harris, *Thinking Visually*. (Portland: Stenhouse Publisher, 2003).
43. *The Hindu*, November 2, 2012.
44. Loumi, loc. cit., p. 43.
45. Chuck Hagel "not antisemitic for saying pro-Israel lobby has a powerful voice." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/07/chuck-hagel-not-antisemitic-israel>
46. Lehrer, Jonah. (2011) *The reason why Jewish became intellectuals*. Retrieved on January 20, 2012 from <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/comment/44936/the-reason-why-jews-became-intellectuals>
47. Reuters, September 3, 2012.
48. "1981: Israel bombs Baghdad nuclear reactor." BBC News (British Broadcasting Corporation). June 7, 1981. Retrieved on January 20, 2013.
49. See, for instance, Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The search for meaning*. (London: OUP, 2004).
50. United States Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three members of his staff were killed in what apparently appeared an organised attack on the US Diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya on September 11, 2012. Reports are unclear as to whether the attack was to mark the anniversary of 9/11 or a 14-minute long documentary which showed Prophet Mohammed in poor light. It was an amateur video prepared by an American who was later arrested.
51. The word Great Satan is a derogatory remark against the United States. The term was first used by Iranian Leader Ruhollah Khomeini in his speech on November 5, 1979.
52. *The Telegraph*, December 5, 2010.
53. Stephen R. David, "Israel's policy of targeted killing." *Ethics and International Affairs*, vol. 17 no. 1, 2003.
54. Loumi, loc. cit., p. 26.

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56. *Frontline*, March, 2005.
57. Antonia Juhasz, "The Tyranny of the Oil: The World's Most Powerful Industry – and What We Must Do to Stop It." (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).
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65. See, for instance, Tripathi, Sudhanshu. (2012) *Mounting tensions between Iran and Turkey*. Retrieved on January 25, 2013 from http://www.parstimes.com/opinion/2012/turkey_iran_tensions.html
66. Takeyh Ray, "What do we know?" in *Iran: The nuclear challenge* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012).
67. Loumi, loc. cit., p. 28.
68. Robert K. Merton. (1936-12) "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 1, no. 6, December 1936, pp. 894-904.
69. For further reference see, for instance, Drolet, Jean Francois. *American Neo-conservatism: A politics and Culture of Reactionary Idealism* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011).
70. *Frontline*, March 11, 2005.
71. *Washington Post*, January 23, 2005.
72. *Frontline*, loc. cit., p. 6.
73. The Monroe Doctrine was articulated in President James Monroe's seventh annual message to Congress on December 2, 1823. The European powers, according to Monroe, were obligated to respect the Western Hemisphere as the United States' sphere of interest. The doctrine warns European nations that the United States would not tolerate further colonisation or the puppet monarchs. The doctrine was conceived to meet major concerns of the moment, but it soon became a watchword of US policy in the Western Hemisphere.

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